



June 28, 2024

The Honorable Derrick Van Orden (R-WI)
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Levin (D-CA)
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
550 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Endeavors Statement for the record for the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity hearing, "Exploring the Use of Data-Driven Methods and Community Collaboration to Reduce Veteran Homelessness"

Dear Chairman Van Orden and Ranking Member Levin:

Thank you for convening this hearing to examine how data-driven methods and collaborative community engagement can help to improve outcomes and reduce veteran homelessness. Endeavors appreciates the opportunity to submit a written statement for the record on this important topic.

Headquartered in Texas, Endeavors is a nonprofit organization committed to providing a helping hand to affirm dignity and improve the quality of life for every client, every time, in every community we serve. Since our founding by five churches in 1969, Endeavors has been dedicated to serving vulnerable populations, which includes veterans, active-duty service members, first responders (including Customs & Border Protection personnel), disaster survivors, migrants, and people who are unhoused or struggling with mental health. Because we believe in the power of community, we care for individuals in these groups – as well as their families. For many years, Endeavors has been honored to be the largest provider of Veteran Supportive Services in the state of Texas, an achievement we take very seriously.

The state of Texas has the second largest veteran population in the country. Currently, Endeavors operates the Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) in 115 Texas counties. The SSVF benefits our homeless veterans, and those at risk of homelessness, and provides much needed financial assistance with the personal guidance, and support of well-trained case managers, dedicated to helping veterans obtain and sustain permanent housing.

Endeavors' Approach to Community Collaboration:

As a large SSVF provider, Endeavors has served veterans and their families in urban and rural settings. In our experience working across multiple states, we have a strong appreciation for community collaboration, which is critical to our success serving clients. We have developed strong community ties in the areas we serve and remain focused on finding ways to reach veterans where they are located to best serve their individual needs. For example, we place our intake staff directly in the larger shelters in the regions we serve, and help process veteran walk-ins, who do not go through the coordinated entry system.



In our work with local partners, Endeavors engages closely in coordination with civic and community leaders, and local organizations to work creatively to fill gaps and connect veterans and their families with necessary resources and supportive services. We hire locally in the communities we serve and build relationships with landlords who offer affordable housing to build trust and responsiveness. For example, this relationship can be critical when a landlord is able to reach our case managers when they need assistance with a veteran in distress. This trust provides them with a comfort level that they can get a response from our team to help them address issues that may arise. As markets have become more expensive over the last few years, these relationships have become imperative to getting clients housed.

In some of the rural communities, we work closely with local city councils, county judges, and surrounding county officials to address gaps in services and resources, including transportation related challenges. We also work with our clients to offer virtual services and connect them with our military family clinics.

Existing Data Gaps: Access to Mental Health Care and Prevention

In order to address veteran homelessness, data is critical to identify where the gaps are and the risk actors. While, homelessness is a very complicated issue, we know that substance abuse and mental health play a role in veteran homelessness. We often see firsthand, the challenges veterans face accessing mental health or substance abuse care with long wait times at the VA. From our perspective, data on prevention needs, which includes mental health support should be a key focus to address issues further upstream. This can help service providers address issues at the front end rather than at the back end. For example, when our case managers take in clients, they need to examine how they got there, and we often see years of trauma, mental health challenges, and wellness factors.

Recommendations:

Endeavors appreciates that there are unique challenges that impact different veteran populations. From our experiences serving veterans, we have identified gaps where Congress and the VA should consider flexibilities in the use of federal funding that if permitted, would increase the chance of long-term housing stability. These policy recommendations would be meaningful, given the impact of inflation on affordable housing and homelessness in the communities we serve.

We recommend the inclusion of the following in the SSVF program:

- **Car payment and repairs:** Transportation is vital to employment and would increase employment and income outcomes, likely leading to housing stability. Auto repairs can be covered by SSVF funds in certain cases. Expanding the circumstances in which car repairs are eligible program expenses would help veterans achieve financial stability and access care by avoiding expensive surprises and providing reliable transport to employment and supportive services, thus promoting job and housing stability, and veterans' wellness.
- **Child care:** The lack of financial resources for child care is a barrier to employment, job skills training, and educational opportunities. Low-income veterans struggle to find adequate child care and the cost of care is a significant hurdle to stable housing. We encourage the VA to explore covering child care costs under the SSVF program or helping to better coordinate available federal resources on child care.
- **Aging veterans:** While the number of homeless veterans has declined in recent years, communities are experiencing an increase in aging homeless veterans and increase in persons over the age of 60 entering homelessness for the first time. Aging veterans, similar to the rest of our aging population have difficulty getting to and keeping medical appointments due to painful, existing conditions. With an increase in the aging veteran population, the VA should examine flexibility in the use of funding for housing accommodations that may be needed for aging veterans – such as assisted living or in home care givers. We also encourage the VA to prioritize the adaption of existing spaces



across the housing continuum—from emergency shelter through market rate housing—to make it accessible and adaptable to meet the needs of veterans as they age.

- **Pet deposits and Pet rent:** Pet support and companionship are key to mental wellness for veterans. Many landlords require upfront deposits and additive monthly payments in rent that are prohibitive towards veterans being able to find affordable housing. Authorizing pet deposits as an eligible use of SSVF funds would be beneficial and encourage more veterans to seek permanent housing through the program.
- **Mortgage payment assistance:** Veterans who use their earned benefit to purchase their home and may face the risk of not only becoming homeless, but losing their investment and good credit history. If veterans lose their home, they stand to lose their equity in their home. Although service providers work to try to help veterans get back on track with other community partners, they are often limited in offering available resources. SSVF does not provide mortgage assistance and the VA should examine this issue, including available data on veteran rates of foreclosures to help identify solutions.

We appreciate the Subcommittee and VA considering pathways to provide new flexibilities in the use of federal dollars to best serve our veterans and their families and improve data-driven methods to address veteran homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Endeavor's perspectives on this important issue. We are happy to be a resource and look forward to working with the Subcommittee on these issues. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Darnell Salley at dasalley@endeavors.org with additional questions.

Sincerely,
Darnell Salley

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chip Fulghum".

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Chip Fulghum
CEO, Endeavors